

# **“The Current Situation of Higher Education in the UK”**

**13:00-14:30, Friday 28 October 2016**

**GakushiKaikan Room 210**

**Professor Dame Julia Goodfellow**

**President**

**Universities UK (UUK)**

**I am delighted to be speaking here today in front of such a distinguished audience.**

**One of the joys of academic life is when experience confirms your prejudices. One prejudice that I have found confirmed has been that nations are often more similar than they are different. In particular, my presidency of Universities UK, the sister organisation to the Japan Association of National Universities, has allowed me to get a much better understanding of how higher education arrangements work in different countries. And it seems to me that the challenges facing Japan are in all too many respects similar to those in the UK. I see, for example, from your mid-term**

**objectives, that you are focussing, among other areas, on engagement with your local communities, promotion of excellence in teaching and research and internationalisation. All these are issues to which UK universities are also giving constant active consideration. I will try and give a brief overview of where our own thinking stands. While our specific experience may not be of direct relevance to the circumstances in Japan, I hope, nonetheless that a perspective on the UK may help you better to calibrate your own thinking.**

**Forgive me if I begin with a touch of immodesty. But I am proud to be able to represent a sector that has achieved much. I recognise that international tables have their flaws but UK universities have achieved far higher results than might be expected from our country's population alone. In the most recent table published by Times Higher Education, for example, the UK has four out of the world's top ten universities; and comes second only to the US in the total number of rated universities. It is of course only fair to point out that Japan, too, punches well above its weight, and is closing in on our total!**

**I believe that the UK's world class system of Higher Education is thanks in no small measure to the fact that it is outward looking and global in its reach. We are the second most popular country for internationally mobile students. The world leading quality of our research is demonstrated by the number of international citations that UK-based research attracts. The international scholars that come to the UK enrich not only mankind's base of knowledge but also the institutions that they visit through the fresh insights that they provide. I believe that whatever challenges the future may bring – and it is clear they may be substantial – this international outlook will continue and that UK Universities will remain vital contributors to the global quest for knowledge and understanding.**

**The challenges that we face in maintaining the excellence of the UK higher education sector are very similar to your own. We need to enhance our research and teaching; we need to engage more meaningfully with our local communities and we need to strengthen our international cooperation. In our case, however, we have the additional complication – to put it mildly – of Brexit. I will come back to Brexit later. But a word first about some of the other**

**current issues in higher education policy. Cumulatively, the sector is facing possibly the greatest upheaval in my professional lifetime.**

### *Teaching*

**UK universities enrol over 2 million students each year from the UK and around world, who study nearly 1,200 different subjects. In the 2015 National Student Survey 86% of students said they were happy with their courses. UK universities also consistently outperform their overseas counterparts in the International Student Barometer survey. Universities are already committed to building on this success by, for example, responding to consumer rights standards and ensuring that our recruitment systems operate fairly and effectively to the benefit of all.**

**The Government has just introduced new draft legislation that will significantly change the environment in which we operate. There is a great deal in this legislation – the Higher Education and Research Bill. But let me set out what I think are the ways in which it, and the agenda that it sets, will have the most significant impact on education:**

**First, there will be a new Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).**

**The sector welcomes the government's commitment to encouraging excellent practice in teaching and learning. But developing and introducing a new initiative such as the TEF is a complex exercise. For it to be workable and helpful to students and university teaching it must be well designed and properly implemented.**

**Second, a new focus will be placed on social mobility. I hope that the work of Universities UK's Social Mobility Advisory Group which has recently reported will be helpful. Universities already work closely with schools and colleges to raise aspirations and attainment. This ranges from outreach programmes and summer schools, to curriculum improvement. Many universities – including the University of Kent - have been sponsoring academies and have been involved in the establishment of new schools for some years now. Around half of universities in England sponsor a school. The Prime Minister has said that Universities should do more in this area. How this is done will vary enormously and depend on the university and on different local circumstances. It is important that any new proposals allow universities the flexibility to consider the**

**evidence and target funding in a way that works best for the school and students to help raise attainment.**

**Third, it will be easier for new universities to be set up, thus potentially greatly increasing the competition.**

**Finally, there will be a new Office for Students to provide the regulatory framework. This will have enhanced powers of enforcement.**

### *Research*

**Many of you will be familiar with the UK's Research Excellence framework. The outcome of the last round reported at the end of 2014. I think almost every University leader in the UK found something in the REF in which they could take pride. I was particularly pleased at Kent that we scored highly in 'Research Intensity', that is, we managed both to submit a high proportion of our staff and also that those staff whose research was submitted achieved positive results. A high level committee has been**

**reviewing the previous REF and has made some recommendations for change. None are revolutionary – though I am personally please that they will have the effect of placing more weight on research intensity. But one key aspect of the previous REF has been confirmed. This is the importance of ‘Impact’. That is ensuring that what is done in universities is relevant to society.**

### *Economic Engagement*

**Impact is crucial for another area where the new government has itself signalled a wish to work with the higher education sector: the development of an industrial strategy.**

**One significant change in the allocation of Departmental responsibilities, following the formation of the new Government in the UK, is that the Minister who will be responsible for university research funding, will also be responsible for Industrial Strategy. Universities are, of course significant businesses in themselves. Higher education contributes in excess of £13Bn a year in export earnings, and the government has a target of growing that contribution to £30Bn by 2020 for the education sector as a whole.**

**They contribute nearly 3% of UK GDP, and generate more than three quarters of a million full time jobs. Put another way, if all the universities in the UK were based in the same city, it would be the fifth largest city economy in the country.**

**Universities have a responsibility and a duty to support economic growth, create jobs and to improve productivity. We, self-evidently, want our country to be strong and we are more than willing to play our part in making it so. And our role extends far wider than the simply economic. We have shown through thousands of impact case studies how society benefits more broadly from universities whether culturally or through social benefit.**

*Brexit*

**Now, back to Brexit. As I probably do not need to tell this audience, it can sometimes be difficult to achieve a consensus among independent-minded academics. Yet, because of their international outlook – and for some more practical reasons that I will come back to later – the UK's universities were unanimously in favour of the UK's continued membership of the European Union. Many of us**



**worked hard for the 'remain' side of the argument, in particular in encouraging our students to register and to vote. It is worth pointing out that younger voters, who will be particularly affected by the referendum, were overwhelmingly in favour: a YouGov exit poll showed 75% of 18-24s voted remain; while a Youthsight survey on 24 July suggested that the proportion was as much as 85% for voters who were students.**

**The outcome of the EU referendum was not therefore the result that universities wanted.**

**Some of you may be familiar with the constitutional position in the UK. But for those who are not, it is worth spelling out an important point. This is that the referendum on June 23rd was in formal terms advisory. The new Government has said that it will implement this advice but we do not know yet which of the range of possible options for Brexit will be chosen by the government. The procedure for withdrawal is set out in Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon. The Prime Minister has said recently that Article 50 will be triggered by no later than March 2017. There will then be a period of two years**

**before withdrawal. This period is open to extension if there is unanimity among the 27 remaining member nations of the EU.**

**At present, the government is still thinking through exactly what it will seek to achieve in the withdrawal negotiations. A very large number of organisations and bodies are feeding in their views in order that its conclusions can be based on the best available evidence. In this context, I would note that the Government of Japan has contributed a particularly thoughtful and detailed analysis. I cannot resist quoting here the views of the Chair of Council at the University of Kent, the former British Ambassador to Japan, Sir David Warren:**

**‘The Japanese analysis, used constructively, is an important guide to what really matters in ensuring that a post-Brexit UK is not only ‘open for business’ but a country that the world’s major investors want to do business with.’**

**Universities, like the government, have accepted the outcome of the referendum and are moving on. During what is likely to be a complex and long drawn out process, we are committed to working with the government to make sure that the UK remains economically and socially an attractive place for foreign investment and for international students and staff. We have, naturally enough, already begun to feed in our own views on how to achieve this objective. I have been encouraged that the government clearly understands the challenges that Brexit presents for Universities and the importance of international collaboration for our success.**

**We have asked the government in particular for support on four key issues:**

- i. Firstly, enhancing international research collaboration, with partners both in Europe and across the globe**
- ii. Secondly, developing policies to enhance the UK as an attractive destination for international students and staff – including immigration policy reforms**
- iii. Thirdly, growing global opportunities for UK students and staff by enhancing mobility programmes; and finally**

**iv. Increasing public investment in research and innovation.**

**Together, these will benefit the UK economy – and society more generally – and enable the UK to continue to play a leading role internationally. I will enlarge on the issues.**

**My first point is to repeat that UK universities are international in outlook. We are still welcoming European students in large numbers – around 125,000. I was delighted that our Minister, Jo Johnson, was able to provide reassurance immediately after the referendum outcome that EU students would continue to be eligible for student loans for the current academic year. We now need further reassurance that this will also apply to the next academic year.**

**The European Union has also facilitated UK students to travel to other European countries. The flow in this direction is, however, not so great. More efforts are needed to encourage UK students to travel to other countries. This is a much wider issue than Europe, of course. I am pleased that Universities UK has had some very**

**useful discussion in London with colleagues in the Japanese Embassy about promoting opportunities for UK students to study in Japan.**

**We will continue to make the strong case for the UK's world-class higher education sector to be given as much support as possible in attracting high quality students and staff. The Brexit side have a point that citizens from highly advanced and friendly countries such as Japan are at a disadvantage in comparison with citizens from other EU countries. While I have no illusions that the politics around immigration will require tough conditionality within the visa regime, the underlying message must be sent strongly that bona fide students and scholars remain welcome and make a highly valuable contribution to the British economy and society. And at individual University level, we must all redouble our efforts to ensure that this welcome is given practical effect, so that when our students graduate they will become strong supporters of our alumni networks and advocates for the benefits of UK higher education.**

**A key issue for all universities is our current access to the Erasmus scheme. This does not directly affect Japan, although there are some opportunities within the scheme for non-EU nationals. We will be making the case to government that we must continue to have this access in any post-Brexit arrangement just as, for example, Norway or Israel have access at present. But there may be new and wider opportunities. I hope, for example, that a new regime might make it easier for Japanese students who currently come to Kent on a Junior Year Abroad to do so in future.**

**I have referred earlier to the extraordinary benefit the UK as a whole derives from the talented international staff who come to the UK. About 43,000 – amounting to some 14% of our academic staff - are from other members of the EU – the figure is 22% at Kent. And 25% of academic staff overall are from other countries – 40% at Kent. An immediate concern for universities as employers to do what we can to respond to the understandable anxiety among these EU staff members. There is an urgent need for the government to clarify their visa status. In the meantime universities need to provide as much reassurance and help as may be possible during a period of uncertainty. At Kent, for example, we have established a central**

**information point which includes some general legal advice. And we are introducing loans to help staff and their families who may wish to apply for citizenship. And, nationally we must continue to assure scholars that they are welcome, through both simple administrative steps and positive rhetoric.**

**The university sector argued strongly before the referendum that our membership of the European Union had major benefits for research. This was not just about money – although that is not negligible. Under Horizon 2020 we are benefitting from grants in excess of the UK’s financial contribution that amount to the equivalent of another Research Council in income each year. But more importantly, there has been the framework for helping to set the international research agenda. While in future this may no longer be possible to the same extent within the EU, we need to be clear that international collaboration in research offers the gold standard and the UK has to be thoroughly engaged.**

**So our attention needs to move quickly to what realistic options there might be outside the EU to ensure a strong basis for university research collaboration across Europe and beyond. It is**

**impossible to predict the shape of any such future arrangements at the present time but it is important that as many as possible are engaged in discussion with counterparts overseas.**

**Again, I hope that Brexit will open new opportunities for collaboration with Japan. I have been struck by just how strong this is already:**

- UK ranks 4th among Japan's international partners for research collaboration (after US, China and Germany)**
- Almost 15,000 co-authored papers were published in the period 2010-2014.**
- More than 8,000 researchers travel between UK and Japanese universities every year. The quality of UK-Japanese co-authored research is high, being cited almost 3 times more than the world average.**
- Major Japanese public research funders, JSPS and AMED, have their European offices in London.**



- **Collaboration under EU funding has been strong: Japan was the UK's 2nd closest non-EU partner in FP7; and around 75% of Japanese researchers' joint projects under FP7 had a UK partner**
- **Several UK universities have Japan offices or formal links in Japan (e.g. Oxford, UCL, Bristol, York); leading Japanese universities have their European offices in the UK.**
- **The British Council's local RENKEI network regularly brings together major UK and Japanese Universities. Britain's academies (inc. Royal Society, Royal Academy of Engineering, Royal Society of Chemistry) are regular visitors, as are many of the Catapults.**

**We would be delighted to work with Japanese colleagues to facilitate more opportunities for senior networking and exchange to encourage the growth of these links.**

### *Conclusion*

**I was on record before the referendum that the biggest challenge that would face the university sector in the event of Brexit would be the uncertainty that it would create. That remains my view. But we**

**have no choice but to rise to this challenge. As we plot a course through uncharted international waters we must remain true to our values. We are best when we are outward looking, globally networked and open to the world. We want to continue to play a role in working with international counterparts in addressing the great global challenges of our age.**

**The future will not be like the past. But I have confidence that the UK university sector as a whole will be fully capable of rising to the new challenges. Throughout our history, we have had to transform ourselves to respond to political, science and cultural changes. Many of our universities have withstood changes far greater and periods of uncertainty far longer than we are currently experiencing. So we are up for change which will support the continued success of UK universities in both our core missions - education and research. And in so doing, we will best help to support the UK in the post-Brexit world.**

**Thank you.**